

Screaming Freedom

poems

by

Allen

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Hines

J.B.S.
J.B. SOLOMON
EDITIONS
♦ Alliance, Ohio ♦

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July 17

Raindrops slam
the pavement of my patio
like dimes falling
from Sears Tower.
I am made rich.

This storm is washing away nothing.

I cannot speak now.
I will have surgery tomorrow
to ease a catheter up my spine.
The catheter will ooze poison
to relax my muscles.
When I wake in post-op,
I will be richer,
and I will speak.

This storm is filling me.

All I fear is drowning.

Progress

I learn to say *scissors*,
and I grit my teeth.
I've said *scissors*
three times,
each time dropping
at least one *s*.

I am told to slow down,
emphasize each sound.
I will read this clearly aloud.
Then, I hope to learn
to over-articulate life.

What it means

The mark on your face
looks like you snuggled
closer on your mother's lap
and caught one of the peaks
on her diamond ring.

The wound fills
but does not crest.

I brush the cut
with my thumb.
I realize this is new, not a scar,
and say, "I'm sorry."

I have lost control again.

Control your muscles,
and you control your body.
Control your feelings,
and you control your self.

In this moment
I have lost all control.
I've stunned you.
The pain was slight
but its meaning deeper.

It means I fight
to be near you.

It means I cannot get close.

And all

I do not know at what point I breathed
after I was birthed,
life cord wrapped tight twice round my neck,
twenty-two years ago tomorrow.

When a chilled wind came to my lungs,
I did not wail.
I had to catch my breath
unconsciously.

Even when I knew nothing
about poverty, race, sex, ability,
I seized at the world,
back arched in body-shocked meditation.

The medical model of disability

“You should be fixed”
is the eternal call
for house pets
and for me.

At Edwin Shaw rehab hospital

I

Window grease smudges
in my room form an awkward
handprint pyramid.

II

Away from nature
and signal trees, haiku waste.
I count floor tiles.

Baclofen detox

The muscle poison detox body sneezes
are coming frequent and heavy.
Curled toes press against the foot of the bed.
Arms flail at the addiction enemy.

The wave melts.
Recovery is quick.
Take another dose –
Valium
to fight the brain flu.

This is a spasm

You must mind it
until it leaves.

It is like your four-year-old
nephew whose hands
have lost their warmth
from throwing snowballs.

It is like those hands
upon your neck
as he gives you a hug.

While the nets bring life

To Colleen, on news of her pregnancy

Read me Neruda pure,
I beg her.
Read me Neruda pure.

She reads to me four of the *20 Poemas de Amor*,
7 through 10,
and I cast my sad nets
toward her oceanic eyes.

I am happy.
The cells are multiplying,
multiplying in just the right heat
on the perimeter
of the bonfire inside her.

Soon, the cell bundle will feel the fire.
It will quicken to the world cupboard
for marshmallows.

His trip back to the fire
with the marshmallows
will be long.

He will be sidetracked many times –

pop loves into his mouth
from the fruit basket on the counter,
fill a cup with vagabond trips.

I am happy
her dripping sink
will coat the bottom of that cup.
I want her to remember:
as he wheels through life,
he will swirl the cup,
and when he drinks,
her drops – the purest drops –
will keep him going.

I stare into her eyes
after she finishes *poema* 9.
I know right now she's purifying herself,
and I love her.

When she urges forth baby Finn
I know we'll drift from each other.
I will cast my sad nets a few times,
and I may catch her once, maybe twice.
But my arms will tire,
the tide will recede.

Right now the tide is in.
Read me Neruda pure.

Free spirits and broken bodies

To Beth and Gabby

It's warm,
even after it rained,
and I want to run.

I will do twenty laps around the city.
My shoes will whine to the wet pavement;
I'm wearing them to a frazzle.

I will collapse,
arms spread wide before me
on the pavement.

I will take in the cloud-rinsed air,
breathe deep nature's exhaust.

They were dancing

They were dancing
in front of riot cops
beside bike cops
surrounded by National Guard troops
in St. Paul, Minnesota,
while across town
John McCain
was nominated
anachronism-in-chief.

They were silly-stringing.

They were silly-stringing
each other in the streets
across town
from the Republican National Convention
in front of riot cops
backed by bike cops
flanked by the National Guard.

They were offering.

They were offering
flowers to riot cops
and they were pepper-sprayed.
They were rubber-bullet-shot.
They were beaten in and out of jail
by the defenders of the state

at the Republican National Convention
in St. Paul, Minnesota.

They could've been hula-hooping.

Actions feed each other.

A kick breaks a nose.

It is so with one of these hoops
swung once round the body
with the arms,
then picked up by the hips.

Force makes it all go round.

The right to remain

My wheelchair would not fit in a paddy wagon crammed with ten other activists. The police would have had to make special accommodations. That was the point.

At first, I was under arrest, though the cops did not bind my hands with zip-ties nor search me. They took away my comrades to bake in the black wagon on the first day of September. They left me alone, stuck but for foot power in my manual chair in downtown St. Paul.

I was no longer under arrest because the cops did not want to deal with me. I sat a while watching the continued loading of friends, thinking of the West and how cops are cowboys. I was the lame calf left mid-pasture.

I was under arrest again when I became unstuck, when a bystander named Joey came to me to ask if I needed help. I was no longer under arrest when Joey negotiated my freedom. As he pushed me from downtown, the cops said we would be arrested if they saw either of us again

Defining state and justice

Eight organizers of a plan to block delegate buses from arriving at the Republican National Convention were arrested on August 31, 2008. Their charges included “conspiracy to riot in furtherance of terrorism.”

Is it terrorism when police unload fifty rounds into Sean Bell, a Black man in New York City, or hang another Black man out the window of a Chicago precinct?

Is it terrorism when relaxed economic regulations steal the retirements of our parents?

Is it terrorism when neoliberalism and the IMF force cuts to anti-poverty programs, and the *barrios* and *favelas* grow?

Is it terrorism when white phosphorous burns to Iraqi bones?

Is it terrorism when religious men are stacked naked atop each other?

Is it terrorism when the world's resources could have saved a Black city on the Gulf, but instead the Blacks and the city drowned?

People – the Eight and many others – have built this movement against the state and its wars. Is it terrorism?

From Sandy Scheuer's fall site

In memory (August 11, 1949 – May 4, 1970), Kent State University

The beech branch nearest me
bows to the left.

The farthest bows right.

Together, they form a pair of lips,
a mouth.

With a burst –

of wind or of a rifle –

I know this tree could speak
of an end to militarism,
of an opening to liberation,
of an opening to peace.

Variations on freedom

I

The ground is dry here
in late April
deep in the woods
beside a thirty-foot cliff.

If we were to scream “freedom” –
and we have, repeatedly –
we would hear the wave
of shrunken leaves
the word carries.

While it’s strange to bring our abundance
here in a blue sedan,
we have what we need –
tents, food and camaraderie,
the last wrapped in our sleeping bags.

We cook in a steel pot
until the wooden handle expands and comes off.
This we will leave behind and buy new.

We will stay here all tomorrow.
When we leave,
we will feel confident
we can make our own society.

We are our own society

but cannot stay.

We must buy our freedom
and supplies to be here.

The forest sustains itself
for itself and we coincide,
grateful for its growth.

We have the conditions
to free ourselves
where we are.
But it's not here.

II

Be here with me now.
We lie wrapped leg-tight
under cotton.

This is little more than a cuddle.
But this is desperate.
This is what I want.

III

I didn't wish to keep you awake
so I gradually wriggled off the blankets
and away from you.

We both shivered that night –
mine a hot, abrupt shiver
that drove me away,
yours, cold and gnawing,
wanting me close.

But this is what I do.

Rather than my uncertain reflexes
upset the sure balance
of a candle
set upon a level table,

I move away.

I need those I love
to hold me tight,
bind me with your arms
and a promise.

Maybe I should
let the candle tip.

Maybe I should
let the table burn.

Maybe if I let myself go,
I'd break apart
and swell into the air
like smoke.

IV

In a photo,
the smell of a crash
lingers around this boy
with a bloodied head.
Atop rubble, he is struggling
with a stone half his weight.

There is something underneath.
Assure me he'll save it.

V

Thank God
for freedom in strength,
that outlaw mentality –
like the mobster
or the warlord
who builds a crony force
to defend what he has
and steal what he wants,
mercilessly.

VI

War sanctions,
war mistakes
and war mayhem
have not helped
a people so unprivileged
by their long-time leader.

Shipments of wheelchairs have arrived in Baghdad
to help those with lost legs,
paralysis, traumatic brain injury.
Shipments continue.

When you bring freedom, military men,
can it be the kind that sets people free?

Wheelchairs, while opening the world
to the places where we are welcome,
are like stockades.

We cannot move from them
and everyone sees our burden
in the center of daily life.

To really help, to really bring freedom,
we must stop the wars
and engage in another conflict
for true equality,
true choice,

true humanitarianism,
truth.

VII

Under the influence of power,
tirade, barrage,
I've forgotten
the power of myself.

It's slipped away,
in crescendos and lulls
like soil from a riverbank.

Alcohol's eaten at it,
and amidst hangovers
I've forgotten how I lost it.

*Believe it,
you worthless cripple.
All you do is break shit.
All you do is get in the way.
Caring for the less fortunate
has its limits, you know.*

*You inconsiderate asshole!
How dare you leave me
after all I've done for you!
You just use people.*

I'm glad to be done.

This is self-liberation.

My power is the power of freedom.

A prayer for Dave Pittman and family

Three hours up State Route 224
to Findlay Hospital,
Uncle Dick fights
through morning
with fading blood platelets.

Wait.
More remains than has been said.

Wait for Dave to kneel
by your chair
when the hospice nurse
is elsewhere.
He has to say goodbye.

Both of you know
leukemia is attempting a blood coup.
What leukemia itself doesn't realize
is that if you die,
it, too, will die.
That is its downfall.

So, I pray for you, Dick.
Fight your usurper.
Fight through morning.
Fight longer.
Create an empire of time.

How leaves grow in spring

I could watch evening
over the tall oaks and elms,
the fading sun firing through leaves
and lighting a rim of wildfire
at their edges.

Walking meditation

Now, I hear the heavy, steady beat
that begins every night around this time.
It starts at one end of my ceiling,
pounds, pounds, pounds to the middle,
then pounds, pounds, pounds back.

Perhaps these are the paces
of an author struggling with a sentence,
tweaking every preposition
until the words become so taut they hum.

Just to say, or America

In Chicago's Greektown,
a man in a light gray cap
stained by soot
from a rusty barrel bonfire
ambled into a gyro bar,
cash in hand.

"No," the woman behind the counter said,
"no, no, no, no, no."

The man showed his three or four
crumpled dollars.

"No," the lamb meat monger said,
"find somewhere else."

The man stood there
rubbing the money
between his thumb and forefinger
as if Washington were some genie.
Or maybe instead of Washington,
rubbing the dollars
would summon someone else
to buy the food for him.

But I just sat there
with my charbroiled –
actually charred –

chicken pita sandwich.

I had the money in my pocket
to buy him twenty gyros.

Or I could have at least bought
his sandwich with his money.

Instead I sat
at a table
sticky from spilled soda
and took a bite
of the chicken
he could have used
as a charcoal briquette.

Lying down an afternoon

Do you remember when it rained without a rain cloud?
how light the raindrops were? how light I was,
my head next to yours, our bodies lying in opposite directions?
Do you remember how the grass took it in?
how the ground was dry when we got up?
Do you remember there was no rainbow?
Maybe we were the end of it,
and we outshone it.

A girl walking into a shadow

I know there's too much
silence in a dark room.

Tomorrow, you will leave,
and I won't know it.
I'll wait for you
by the fountain,
throwing away my pocket change.
I'll leave after reaching
your voicemail twice.

I will find you weeks later,
still shaking, skinnier and sleepless.
You'll come back for only hours
to get your things.

I will press against you
and hold you
because I have no words.

I will wait for you to speak,
having suffered the sleeplessness
of too little of your tender voice.

Escuchar

The Spanish word for “listen”
seems to say “hush.”
So I do and hear you
far off.

Far off I hear the echo
of dead words.
*Use these candles to light
your way to ever-better days.*

Far off those candles
look like stars
that have burned
for millions of years.
When will the wax evaporate?

The remnants will collect far off
over Youngstown
in those dark clouds
that don’t come from factories
anymore.

And in the fields and universe
west of the city,
sometimes when I call out
for my bearings,
the only person to answer
is me.

Far off I – mind, mouth and heart –
will be quiet for you.
But now I call again:
“Shout back. Be my echo.”

Far off I lost a love
you burned.

A bridge

Markhors butt
among warriors
in the foothills
of Pakistani mountains,
and they're beautiful, I'm sure.

I cannot roll there
on a smooth concrete path.
I cannot watch them
without destroying their world.

I concede
I cannot go all places.

Here, though, fifty dollars
would bridge the step
into this restaurant
and humanize me.

August 26

Today, a (I think) black SUV driven by Melinda K. of Twinsburg struck me as I drove the sidewalk toward a tanning salon's vehicle cutout. She hit me on the left side of my wheelchair. And she kept accelerating until my chair tipped. After I was back in the chair, she said that she thought the scraping noise was just the curb. She hadn't seen me. Isn't that the case?

Where is this cloak I wear, and how do I shed it? I move in this squat tank, two hundred pounds glaring sun off leather and steel, and either it's all others see, or it and the person it carries are not there at all.

I will set fires around me. I will hang candles from trees. I will catch this cloak. It will burn.

I loaded the syringe

Can you stick me?

When –

When the others

rolled, tumbled, jumping-jacked

across the floor

while I was forced to weave

in and out, in and out, in

between, around, through

traffic cones because the gym teacher

worried I'd sue if I fell and got hurt –

I loaded the syringe.

Can you stick me?

When –

When I rolled

into a barber shop

and the snip-snippers

snapped their necks

looking away

from the ringing door

to look swept up

in sweeping fallen hair,

I heard them saying "Not it."

I loaded the syringe.

Can you stick me?

When –

When you said you're enabling me
to be disabled – your helping me get groceries,
your helping me use the ATM,
reach the too-tall "Insert card here" slot,
grab the money so I don't lose it to my muscles
and toss it in the air like it's Mardi Gras –
it's spoiling me and giving me an excuse
not to do it myself.

I loaded the syringe.
Can you stick me?

When –

All this and I'm still here.
I'm still here, and I'm still fighting.
I'm still fighting and have no plans to quit.

I loaded the syringe.
Can you stick me?

I loaded the syringe
with all this. It's a vaccine.

I loaded the syringe.
Can you stick me?

I loaded the syringe.
Can you stick me?

Cripple

Invalid, feeble-minded, monster
Person with a disability
Retard, gimp, mongrel
Moron, non-ambulator
Drain on society
Wheelchair user
Disabled person, mystic
Fireside watcher, re-definer
One whose soul has led him here

The locust festival

I drive by the farm fields of Stark County and watch the corn and
the wheat grow.

I think of the locusts and their nibbling.

I think of how they don't come up anymore
except when someone's done something Pat Robertson doesn't
like.

I think of the locusts' coming as part of an al Qaeda plot,
the swarm corralled and rendered to Syria for questioning.

I think of the Malawian children who wait for locust season
and run out among them, pick them up, eat the fair fries with
moving parts.

Silence on the wind

I've seen two dead squirrels –
one picked clean
but for fur and bone,
the other, intact,
swept to the side of Main Street.

It's a warm day,
and I sit in the Porters' yard.
Mrs. Porter fills her bird feeder.
When seed spills to the ground,
she stops pouring,
then pats the ornamental squirrel
perched atop the feeder.

I ask her if the squirrel scares away the birds.
She says the flowers around the feeder
are what brings the birds,
and no rodent can interfere with that attraction.
Besides, squirrels are harmless.

That was the day before
Mr. Porter blocked the bedroom door
with the chiffonier,
shot Mrs. Porter, then shot himself.
That was also the day before Scott came home
from school to silence.

Venice

My ass sticks
to the dried-piss-covered seat
in the Venice Cafe.

I go on anyway –
pull down, empty, pull up,
fasten, call for Dave outside.

Dave comes in,
hooks his arms behind me,
helps me to stand,
and we do our kind of jig
toward the door.

Before we get to the door,
a man enters, looks at us,
and tells me not to worry.
“I’ve been there, man,” he says.

Dave and I end our dance
with a twirl, and I spill
into the seat of my wheelchair –
still just two feet
from the too-narrow bathroom door.

The foreigner

I speak a foreign tongue.
I order a cheeseburger
and get a chili dog.
I ask for directions to the restroom
and end up at a soda machine.

I may not be fluent
in your language.
I sometimes pick
my way around words that give me trouble.
But I'm doing this work,
and it deserves respect.

So many suns to set

Finishing off half a pound
of strawberries with yogurt
is joyful work
on a Sunday evening.
I teethe the tiny leaves
of the last dimpled ruby.

The air has lost its heat
with the setting sun.

In January, I had planned
to take a heavy dose
of hallucinogens,
wait until I could not feel,
then get in the shower
and run the water
to limit the mess.
Then, I would slit my wrists,
and I would wait.

I pull the sweater
from the plastic deck chair
beside me. Still warm
after absorbing the evening light,
it blesses me
and I bless this day.

A thank-you

You were sleeping,
your hands tucked
under your chin.

I hesitated to wake you.
Find this taped to the mirror.
I love you.

About the author

Allen Hines was raised in Stark County, Ohio, where the weekend's excitement is time-and-a-half on Saturday. He has lived with cerebral palsy all his life and has attempted various abortive procedures to improve his condition. No cure lies in sight, so his intent now is to give a passionate voice to the realities of disability. He will graduate from Kent State University in December 2009; then he hopes to move to Portland, Oregon. His journalistic work has appeared in several Northeast Ohio newspapers, as well as *The Weekly Dissident*, *CyBurr* and *Uhuru*. In 2006, he won a Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Scholarship Award for "Just to say, or America," which is included in this collection.